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Statistics and Its Methods

The Private Wealth of Australia and Its Growth. Together with a Report of the War Census of 1915. By G. H. KNIBBS. (Melbourne: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics. 1918. Pp. 196.)

This bulletin not only presents in detail figures concerning the topics naturally suggested by the title but it also constitutes a highly valuable textbook on ways and means of correctly measuring wealth and income; in fact, its interest to the statistician as a treatise on method will probably be far more enduring than its appeal to the general public as a source of information concerning Australian economic conditions.

The author proves himself to be a clearheaded economist and a keen statistical analyst by his discussion of the following topics: (1) the nature of national wealth; (2) the various modes of estimating wealth; (3) grades of ownership; (4) net income; (5) net assets. His really important contributions to economic thought are comprised under the titles: (1) the relations between wealth and income; and (2) the estimation of wealth from probate returns. The latter topic especially represents a great amount of research and careful reasoning combined with a very large amount of statistical work and a most adroit use of mathematics. It seems to settle definitely most of the much mooted points concerning the determination of wealth distribution among the entire population by an analysis of the records of estates probated. No one, hereafter, who is engaged in investigations of this nature can afford to proceed further until he has given careful attention to Mr. Knibbs's work, for it covers the field in a most masterly and scientific fashion, apparently far outranking any single study of this nature heretofore undertaken. The author has, in this respect, set a high standard of excellence well worthy of imitation by other government statisticians.

In the opinion of the reviewer, the form in which the statistics have been presented might have been materially improved in several respects. The titles of tables and graphs, especially the sub-headings, frequently are somewhat obscure; usually because clarity has been sacrificed to brevity. The chief defects of the study, however, lie in the nature of the figures presented. Net income and assets are stated for the various individuals, male and female. It is evident that in many instances these individual returns were from members of families containing two or more persons report-

ing income or wealth; but there is no evidence that such returns have been combined to indicate the correct "family" income. Since wealth and income must both, for most purposes, be considered as pertaining to the family as a whole, and not merely as personal perquisites, statistics showing individual holdings or receipts are necessarily of but minor value. But since the same defect is found so commonly in similar statistics in other countries, the Australian figures are comparable in some respects with those in the publications of other governments. Such data will, however, never be presented in their most useful form until wealth and income are calculated for each "family as a whole" and the total for each family is divided by the number of "consuming units" in that family in order to give the wealth or income per unit. Only in this manner can the various families and individuals of a nation be given even a reasonably accurate economic classification. This fact apparently did not suggest itself to those responsible for the Australian war census.

Another weakness appearing in those few of the tables which cover considerable periods of time is that no attempt has been made to correct the data for changes in the price level, and, as everyone knows, these changes have been far from negligible.

In taking the Australian war census of wealth and income, the inhabitants were depended upon to fill out and mail in their own returns. As many, doubtless, failed to do so, the per capita estimates of income derived in this manner are probably so much too low as to be practically worthless. The estimate of \$236 is the one arrived at, a figure presumably somewhat less than two thirds as great as the per capita income of the inhabitants of the United States at the same date. The private wealth of Australia was estimated upon an inventory basis and apparently is not subject to the error of incomplete returns. It is computed to be \$1,592 per capita in 1915 as compared with the estimates by the United States Census of 1912 of \$1,965 per capita. To make the Australian figures strictly comparable, it would be necessary to add the value of the railways and perhaps some other items to their totals, since government ownership in Australia is more extensive than in this country.

Though the figures given in the book are, unfortunately, comparable in but few respects with American statistics along similar lines, much raw material is furnished from which many interesting comparisons may hereafter be worked out. The book must, then,

be commended much more highly as a source of raw material and as a treatise on the method of studying wealth and income than as a finished description of Australian economic conditions.

WILLFORD I. KING.

NEW BOOKS

DAVIS, W. A. *A brief study of 2,000 birth certificates.* (Austin, Texas: Bureau of Vital Statistics. 1918. Pp. 12.)

Dr. Davis, State Registrar of Vital Statistics of Texas, presents in a simple and telling manner the deficiencies in returns under the new registration law. In the 2,000 certificates, for instance, 673 omit the name of the child, 278 the place of birth of the mother, 164 the birthplace of the father, 72 the birthplace of the child, 18 the date of birth, and so forth; 138 certificates were made out in pencil. This is all an index of the amount of education needed by the physicians, even of the more thickly populated and advanced portions of the state, before adequate compliance with the law can be looked for. Dr. Davis also gives some very interesting analyses of the content of the certificates. The results are not definitive or exhaustive but they are a valuable suggestion of the sort of information adequate registration will afford, and as such are of importance as an educative factor to the people of the state.

A. B. W.

HOFFMAN, F. L. *The malaria problem in peace and war. A consolidation of papers read at the annual meeting of the National Committee on Malaria, Memphis, Tenn., November 12, 1917 and the annual convention of the New Jersey Mosquito Eradication Commission, Atlantic City, N. J., January 31, 1918, materially revised and enlarged and brought down to date.* (Newark, N. J.: Prudential Press. 1918. Pp. 101.)

Census of prairie provinces. Population and agriculture. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta. (Ottawa: Census & Statistics Office. 1918. Pp. lxvi, 356.)

Mortality statistics, 1916. Seventeenth annual report. (Washington: Bureau of the Census. 1918. Pp. 543.)

Statistics of fire departments of cities having a population of over 30,000. (Washington: Bureau of the Census. 1918. Pp. 105.)

Year book of the state of Indiana for the year 1917. (Indianapolis: Secretary of State. 1918. Pp. viii, 883.)

El movimiento del estado civil y la mortalidad de la República Oriental del Uruguay en el año 1917. (Montevideo: Abelardo Vescovi, director general. 1918. Pp. 77.)